

Lysimachos, the King of Thrace, as Seen Through His Coins



Lysimachos Tetradrachm ca. 297-281 BC, Lysimachea Mint. (2X)

The Companion:

Lysimachos (c. 361-281 BCE) was one of Alexander the Great's trusted bodyguards and a member of his Companion Cavalry. Although he had obtained Macedonian citizenship, his father was a Thessalian (some sources say Thracian) named Agathokles.

As Alexander's Bodyguard:

Educated at the royal court in Pella, Lysimachus rose to become a prominent member of the king's entourage, one of his bodyguards or *somatophylax* (bodyguard) by 328 BC. There he served with great distinction and bravery. In one account, soon after the capture of the Persian capital, Susa, Alexander went on a hunt at one of Darius' parks (*paradisoi*), when his party was attacked by a particularly large lion. It was Lysimachos who put himself in danger by grappling the lion, largely bare handed except for a spearhead broken off one of the party's spears. Though seriously wounded, Lysimachos managed to kill the lion by himself, which brought him great acclaim for his strength and bravery.

Historians write of his involvement in the battle of the Hydaspes against King Poros - it was recorded that he crossed the river with the king - and later, during the siege of the Indian city of Sangala, was apparently wounded at this siege. The historian Arrian, in his *The Campaigns of Alexander*, wrote:

“Throughout the siege Alexander lost a little under 100 men; the number of wounded, however, was disproportionately large - over 1,000, among them being Lysimachos, of Alexander's personal guard, and other officers.”

Lysimachos the Satrap:

After Alexander's death in 323 BC, Alexander's conquests were divided between his generals and some of his *somatophylaxi*. Lysimachos was awarded for his loyalty to Alexander, by being offered the strategically important province of Thrace, an area northeast of Macedon along the Black Sea coast, a job none of the others of the *Diadochi* (Companions of Alexander) wanted. Most of the rest of the empire was taken by Alexander's generals, Perdikkas, Antigonos Monophthalmos (the One-eyed and his son, Demetrios I Poliorketes (the Besieger of Cities) and Ptolemy I Lagos Soter (the Savior). Smaller *satrapies* (provinces) were also deeded to surviving members of Alexander's *somatophylaxi*.

While he initially remained relatively neutral in the series of wars that immediately followed Alexander's death, Lysimachos was too busily involved in quelling rebellions among a number of the Thracian tribes to get involved. Finally, after defeating the greatest of his enemies, Seuthes III, he was secure enough to get involved in the constant struggle for control of Alexander's empire, that became known as the *Wars of the Diodochi* as he too sought to expand his land holdings.

In 315 BC, Lysimachos was forced to quell a revolt in one of the cities ceded to him in the above mentioned war and Antigonos used this as an excuse to try to intervene in Lysimachos' affairs and caused trouble for him in his other holdings. This interference resulted in the start of hostilities and the establishment of an alliance against Antigonos, consisting of Ptolemy I and a number of Lysimachos' former bodyguard colleagues, including Seleukos I and Kassander, his closest political friend, in a war against Antigonos Monophthalmos and his son, Demetrios I Poliorketes.

Even though the alliance failed to completely defeat Antigonos and Demetrios, it nevertheless managed to force them to cede much of western Anatolia to Lysimachos, their chief antagonist, and give more autonomy to the rest of the alliance.

The Road to Kingship:

In 309 BC, Alexander's mother, Olympias grew impatient as Alexander IV, son of Alexander the Great by his first wife, Roxana, neared adulthood. Although Alexander IV had been nominally proclaimed co-monarch of Alexander's kingdom along with Alexander's mentally challenged half-brother, Philip III, they both had no real authority. Nevertheless, Olympias was jealous of Philip III, and had him murdered.

Kassander, who had long awaited such a move as an excuse to make a grab at the monarchy, immediately besieged the royal residence and after several months managed to capture Olympias as she attempted to escape. Olympias was then tried for regicide and brutally executed, with her body left unburied for the animals to consume. By 305 BC, Kassander had also grown tired of the young Alexander and Roxana and quietly murdered the two and proclaimed himself King of Macedonia.

Rather than avenging themselves on Kassander, the remaining regents and Satraps declared themselves kings as well, and thus the figment of Alexander The Great's empire was abandoned by those who had once promised to maintain it. The kingdom was now divided between Antigonos I, in Babylon, Demetrios I, in Thebes, Kassander in Macedonia, Ptolemy I Lagos in Egypt, Seleukos in Syria, and Lysimachos in Thrace, with Pyrrhos, Alexander's cousin, awaiting at the side.

In 302 BC, Antigonos and Demetrios, now recovered from their earlier debacle, immediately invaded Anatolia with vastly superior forces. The invasion forced Lysimachos to once again call upon Ptolemy I and Seleukos to come to his aid as he was begrudgingly but skillfully forced to retreat westward and northward toward Lysimacheia, his capital in Thrace. All the while, as Lysimachos awaited for his allies to gather their armies and come to his aid, Lysimachos' vastly outnumbered forces managed to bleed the invading armies white.

Just in the nick of time, Seleukos pushed northward from Babylon with an army that included over a hundred war elephants and struck Antigonos' and Demetrios' armies on their flank near the city of Ipsos in Anatolia, Antigonos, now over eighty years of age, was killed, when his army was caught between Seleukos' army, acting as the hammer, and Lysimachos' army, which had ceased its retreat, turned around and served as the anvil. Antigonos' army and that of his son were completely crushed. Demetrios, sacrificing his own army to the slaughter, managed to flee back to Corinth with his own son

and a few retainers. Years later, he would be captured by Seleukos' agents and held in a comfortable captivity at Antioch in Syria, where he supposedly committed suicide.

Earliest Coinage:

Although it is unknown exactly when and which coins were the first coins of Lysimachos were minted, there are clues that potentially point them out for those interested in his coinage. Undoubtedly, for the first few years after Lysimachos' acquisition of Thrace, the already existing mint sites within his Satrapy continued minting the accustomed coins of the towns and cities bypassed as Alexander's armies invaded the more populous parts of the Persian Empire. It is believed by many, that the first coinage actually intended for Lysimachos was not even minted in Thrace at all, but was struck in Amphipolis, in Macedon by Kassander, after Antipater's death. The very first of these coins consisted of medium bronzes styled after the bronze coins issued during Philip II's reign and carried over into Alexander the Great's. These coins obverses depict Apollo (shown as a youth, sometimes attributed as being the young Alexander the Great), while the reverse shows a young male riding a spirited stallion. Above the coin in the name ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥ: which translates as "of Philip", or more accurately "I'm Philip's". Sometimes these are called posthumous coins of Philip II, Alexander the Great's father, but were actually in the name of Philip II Arrhidaeos.



1. First coinage (enlarged 2x)

So how do we know that these were minted for Lysimachos when he was the Satrap of Thrace? The answer is: under the horse's right rear leg is the initial (ΛΥ), the first two letters of Lysimachos name. For those who were illiterate, there is also a maned lion's head, alluding to the great lion Lysimachos slew barehanded. Beneath the lion's head, and partially effaced on this coin would also be a spearhead, the weapon used to kill the lion. (see the enlargement above.)

We see something similar on the first silver coins issued for Lysimachos, silver tetrobols or four obols. These coins are of similar composition to the previous coin, only made of silver, Above the horse and rider is the name of the monarch in whose name the coin was minted. In the case of the first coin [2] (enlarged to show details) was minted in the name of Alexander the Great's son, Alexander IV. Beneath the horse's belly is the protome (forepart) of a lion and once again the initials, ΛΥ. Other than wear, the second coin [3] appears nearly nearly identical to the first. This one, however, is dedicated to Philip III Arrhidaeos. One can read the first three letters at the top of the coin, ΦΙΛ. The remaining ones were partially off the flan and are illegible. As with the previous coin. Lysimachos' initials can be found beneath the horse's belly along with the forepart of a lion. beneath the ground line, however, a spear point can be seen, where it was worn away on the previous coin.



2



3

Lysimachos the King:

In 309 BC, Alexander's mother, Olympias grew impatient as Alexander IV, son of Alexander the Great by his first wife Roxana, neared adulthood. Although Alexander IV had been nominally proclaimed co-monarch of Alexander's kingdom, along with Alexander's mentally slow half-brother, Philip III, they both had no real authority. Nonetheless, Olympias was jealous of Philip III, and had him murdered. Kassander, who had long awaited such a move as an excuse to make a grab at the monarchy immediately besieged the royal residence and after several months, managed to capture Olympias as she attempted to escape.

Olympias was then tried for regicide and brutally executed, and her body was thrown into the wilderness without burial. By 305 BC, Kassander had also grown tired of the young Alexander IV and his mother, Roxana and quietly murdered the two and proclaimed himself King of Macedonia. Rather than avenging themselves on Kassander, whose armies were composed mostly of battle-hardened veterans, the remaining regents and satraps declared themselves kings as well, thus avoiding a truly calamitous civil war and also safely ensuring their own rise to power. Thus the illusion of Alexander The Great's empire was abandoned by those who had once promised to maintain it. The kingdom was now divided between Antigonos I, in Babylon, Demetrios I, in Thebes, Kassander in Macedonia, Ptolemy I Lagos in Egypt, Seleukos in Syria, and Lysimachos in Thrace, with Pyrrhos, Alexander's cousin, waiting at the side.

The First Royal Coins:

In 305 BC, shortly after Lysimachos formally proclaimed himself king of Thrace, he made changes in his coinage. The names of Alexander IV and Philip III were removed from the tetrobols. Interestingly, his complete name still did not appear on any of his coins, the customary ΛΥ but is moved to above the horse and rider.

For a long time, these ΛΥ tetrobols were thought to have preceded the ones of the co-monarchy. A large majority of these coins are found in either a very worn state or damaged by environmental corrosion but recently a hoard of these was discovered in near mint condition that contained both the ΛΥ types and those with the monarchs' name. Wear indicated that both types, were very nearly simultaneously issued. However, a number of the ΛΥ coins clearly showed that the monarchs' names had been scratched off the reverse dies and replaced by Lysimachos' initials. This discovery proved that the ΛΥ tetrobols were minted after the others, an indication that the ΛΥ tetrobols were actually struck after Lysimachos became king.



4



5

Above, coins 4 and 5 are examples of the ΛΥ type of Lysimachos' Tetradrachms. (Note) There is no indication at which mint these two tetradrachms were struck, but the differing styles of the two coins indicate that these coins' dies were at least made by different engravers, whereas the previous two coins 2 and 3 were made by the same engraver, and may even have been struck using the same obverse die



for both coins.



6



7

8

Lysimachos' other silver coins; drachms and the tetradrachms also show a modest transformation between satrapal issues and regnal issues near the time of Lysimachos' royal ascension. Coins 6, and 8 are both from the same mint, Kolophon in Asia Minor, and probably from the same hand. Coins 6 and 7 are both drachms. Coin 6 was struck while Lysimachos was still satrap, while 7 was struck by a different engraver at a different mint at a later time. Coin 8 is a tetradrachm or a four drachm piece, struck at nearly the same time as drachm 6, but after Lysimachos became king. All three coins depict a forepart of a lion in front of Zeus, but coins 6 and 8 both have a pentacle between the legs of Zeus' throne. This is one of the mintmarks belonging to Kolophon. Behind Zeus we see the king's names. Coin 6's inscription is: ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ (of Alexander) probably for Alexander IV. Interestingly, there seems to be no such coins minted in the name of Philip III. Coin 7's inscription is: ΛΥΣΙΜΑΧΟΥ (of Lysimachos). Coin 8 is also in the name of Lysimachos.

With the defeat and death of Antigonos at Ipsos, Lysimachos was able to expand his kingdom into Anatolia, controlling such rich municipalities as Pergamon, Ephesos and Byzantion, as well as important ports along the western shores of the Black Sea. These cities were key to the commercial

prosperity of his kingdom as well as vital sources of grain from rich lands west of the Black Sea and goods arriving in the Eastern Mediterranean from the Far East. As trade within Lysimachos' kingdom expanded, so did its wealth. Lysimachos no longer needed help from Macedonia to supply him his coinage. He began to build mints throughout his kingdom. Soon dozens of different mints were flooding not only Lysimachos' kingdom, but much of the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as the Black Sea area.

Climax:

There is an old adage: "Pride precedeth the Fall." That was indeed true for Lysimachos. In his case, his fall was precipitated by an unwise marriage.

Lysimachos married at least three times, probably more. Legend had it that Lysimachos had fifty sons, though there is little historical evidence of that, it is, however, a well established fact that most Macedonian men at the time of Philip and Alexander married young. So it is probable that Lysimachos left a wife behind when he rode off to war with Alexander. At any case, even if Lysimachos was single when he left Macedonia in 336 BC, it is a certainty that as one of Alexander's *Somatophylaxites*, he would have taken part in the mass marriage of Macedonian officers to noble Persian women in Susa in 324 BC.

Lysimachos was always one to take advantage of any political advantage when it came his way, and around 305 BC, he married Nicaea, the daughter of the Antipater, the regent of Macedonia during Alexander's absence. This marriage provided a strong alliance with Antipater as well as with his son Kassander at a time when control of Thrace was in question. This union produced three children, two daughters and a son, Agathokles, who became Lysimachos' heir.

It is unknown what became of Nicaea, but in 302 BC, during his second alliance with Kassander, Ptolemy I and Seleukos I, Lysimachos married the widowed queen and Persian princess, Amastris of the Anatolian city of Heraklea.

In 300 BC., Ptolemy I Soter, offered his sixteen year old daughter, Arsinoe II, in marriage to Lysimachos as part of an alliance between themselves as insurance against the rising ambitions of Seleukos I Nikator of Syria, who had already amassed a majority of Alexander's conquests into his own kingdom.

Lysimachos quickly became totally enamored with the the girl, who was young enough to be his granddaughter. Amastris, for her part, graciously allowed Lysimachos a divorce and returned to Heraklea, to reign as its queen.

This divorce was amicable. Lysimachos seems to have had genuine affection for Amastris allowing her to rule Heraklea without his interference. However, soon after Lysimachos' marriage to Arsinoe, Amastis' two sons from a previous marriage, in an act of rebellion, murdered her with their own hands. They then proclaimed themselves co-regents of the area around Heraklea known as Pontos and rose up in rebellion against Lysimachos.

Lysimachos reacted with alacrity and with a vengeance. After a short and brutal campaign, Heraklea was taken, all its males were slaughtered, and its women and girls were sold into slavery. Amastis' sons were tortured and executed in a particularly brutal manner considered too cruel to be recorded by historians of the day. Lysimachos then resettled the city by moving the population of Kolophon there and renamed it Amastris, after his beloved Persian princess.

Arsinoe was a master of manipulation, and the battle-scarred and grizzled old monarch was putty in her hands. As a wedding gift to the bride, he renamed the famed port city, Ephesos, to Arsinoeia in her honor.



Coins 9&10: Wedding Commemorative Issue from Lysimachaea ca. 300 BC,

9. Arsinoe

10. Lysimachos

Conspiracy:

Lysimachos and Arsinoe had three sons together, Ptolemy, Philip and Lysimachos II. Arsinoe desired and demanded that her sons should take precedence over Agathokles, Lysimachos' heir and son from his marriage to Nicaea. Lysimachos refused to listen to her.

Spurned by Lysimachos' reaction, Arsinoe began to plot with her older brother, Ptolemy Keraunos (The Thunderer) to rid herself of Agathokles forever. She and Keraunos (who was a prodigal after he had been banished by his father, Ptolemy I, due to a plot by Keraunos to force Ptolemy's abdication in Keraunos' favor) began a campaign of slander and innuendo against Agathokles.

This campaign of malicious rumors and innuendo was launched by the siblings to convince Lysimachos that Agathokles was plotting against him to usurp his throne. At first, Lysimachos ignored the pair, but through bribery and threats, the plotters fabricated a case of treason so believable, Lysimachos finally relented and executed his son for treason, and named Arsinoe's eldest son his heir.

Agathokles was much beloved by the people in Lysimachos kingdom, unlike his father who had a reputation as being cruel and uncaring. The reaction to the execution was swift and overwhelming. City after city rose up in rebellion. The final blow came when Philatairos, the governor of Pergamon, and Lysimachos' most trusted and loyal friend rebelled, seizing the greater portion of Lysimachos' huge treasury at the same time. For the last time, Lysimachos summoned his army to overthrow the rebellion.

Unknown to Lysimachos, Philatairos had been in correspondence with Seleukos I, pleading with him to come to his aid. Seeing an opportunity to rid himself of a formidable opponent and an obstacle to his own ideal of reforming Alexander's vast empire, Seleukos agreed to help and massed his own army for an invasion.

Downfall:

The two Octogenarians met at Korupedion, near present day Ankara, in 281 BC. The battle was bloody for both sides. Finally, as evening drew near, Lysimachos was overwhelmed and slain. His body was found the next day, watched over by his faithful old dog, who had kept the vultures and other scavengers away from the corpse.

Seleukos was on the verge of fulfilling his dream: reuniting Alexander's empire. Lysimachos death had given him Thrace and Macedonia. Only Egypt, now ruled by Ptolemy I's second son, Ptolemy II Philadelphos, remained, but first Seleukos desired to visit his old home in Macedonia. He would never

make it. During a celebration of his victory, held in Lysimacheia in Thrace. Ptolemy Keraunos, who was now under Seleukos' protection, stabbed the aged conqueror in the back, ending his life and with it, his dreams of being the second Alexander.



11



12



13



14



15



16



17

(All shown actual size.)

Late Lysimachos Coins: mint sites:

Tetradrachms:

11- Lysimachea in Thrace.

12 - Lampsakos in across the Hellespont in Ionia.

13 -Amphipolis in Macedonia.

14 - Pella, Macedonia: the last mint established by Lysimachos in 282/1 BC, and may be posthumous.

15- Kyzikos, southeastern Anatolia, posthumous ca 250 BC.

Drachms:

16&17- Ephesos, western coast of Anatolia.

The Last Coins:

Starting in 297 BC, Lysimachos began a revolutionary new coinage that would turn the Hellenistic world on its head. Prior to this series of silver coins, there was an unspoken rule that no mere mortal could be depicted on coins. There had been tacit violations of this rule, such as Philip II depicting himself as Zeus on his tetradrachms and Alexander's tetradrachms depicting himself as Herakles, but though this was generally known, they were mere models and thus no rule had been broken. What Lysimachos did was put his own portrait as the deified Alexander (hence the horns) on the obverse of all his precious metal coins: drachms, tetradrachms and gold staters. Tetrobols were no longer minted.

Lysimachos' coins became the standard of the highest quality. Coins in his name were struck in one form or another for over two hundred years after his death from dozens of mints in many countries formed out of his kingdom as well as beyond. Today they are among the most sought after coins by collectors of ancient coins.

Above are shown five tetradrachms [11-15] from various mints, while [16,17] are drachms from the mint in Ephesos with dies of two different engravers and probably from different times, with 16 probably being the earlier. The dies for no.17 were also used for gold staters.

The obverses of all of the coins depict Lysimachos in the guise of the deified (thus horned) Alexander. The reverses depict seated Athena holding Nike in her outstretched right hand while a spear or a staff leans on her left shoulder, and a shield with Lysimachos' badge of the face of a lion forms the shield's boss.

The iconography of the reverses is important. Up to that time 287-2, Athena was primarily depicted standing or charging while thrusting with her spear; a distinctly warlike pose. On Lysimachos' coins, Athena is at peace, resting, her weapons set aside or (as shown on coin 11) replaced by a staff.

Legacy:

Lysimachos may not be as famous as some other monarchs in history, but he nevertheless had a legacy that still touches us today, if only modestly. Botanically, there is an herbal plant named after him, of the genera, *lysimachia*, commonly called loosestrife. Lysimachos' name roughly translates as “Looser of Strife”, a name that perfectly fit the man. But there is another legacy that is passed down through history because of his remarkable coinage, especially his final series of gold staters, silver drachms and tetradrachms, considered by many to be among the most beautiful coins of all time. Other monarchs attempted to emulate his coins, but few could surpass them.



Lysimachos' last Tetradrachm series struck in 281 BC at Pella, capital of Macedonia

Addendum 1:

Some Notable Ancient Coins Influenced by Lysimachos' Coinage:



Eumenes I, King of Pergamon, 261-241 BC. Tetradrachm
Pergamon, ca. 261 BC.



Attalos I, King of Pergamon, 241-197 BC. Tetradrachm
Pergamon, ca. 241 BC.



Ptolemy I Soter, Pharaoh, 305-284 BC. Tetradrachm
Memphis, ca. 295 BC.



Ptolemy II Philadelphos, Pharaoh, 284-246 BC. Tetradrachm
Tyre, ca. 282 BC



Demetrios I Polioketes, King of Macedonia, 306- 283 BC
Tetradrachm, Pella ca. 295 BC.



Seleukos I Nikator, King of Syria, 315-281 BC. Drachm,
Persepolis



Aesillas, Roman Questor of Macedonia, 90-75 BC.
Tetradrachm, Amphipolis.

Addendum 1: Continued



Eukratides I, King of Bactria. ca. 161 BC. Tetradrachm
Pushkalavati, ca. 160 BC.

